

NORTH EAST MOUNTAIN TRUST

Protecting the coastal and mountain
environment of Scotland



30 Hillview Road
Aberdeen AB15 9HA
Scottish Charity No. SC008783

The Manager
National Trust for Scotland
Mar Lodge
Braemar
Aberdeenshire AB35 5YJ

14th January 2017

Dear Mr. Frew,

Timber Works in the Linn of Dee Area

I am writing to you on behalf of the North East Mountain Trust (NEMT). As you know, NEMT represents hill walkers, climbers and other groups of people who visit and enjoy Scotland's mountain land. Individual and club membership totals around 900 people. NEMT aims to protect wild land in Scotland from inappropriate developments for all who enjoy visiting such places. It has a particular commitment to the greater Cairngorms area.

Over the years, we have been very supportive of many of the Trust's initiatives on the estate and, in particular, the work to encourage natural tree regeneration. When the Independent review was carried out, we defended the Trust's approach and stated that the report was not entirely fair to the NTS. We continue to support the work that you're doing on the estate. However, we have had some complaints from our members about the thinning work ongoing at the Linn of Dee and earlier this month, I and a group of our members visited the Linn of Dee area to see for ourselves the results of the ongoing timber harvesting. We are raising these concerns with you as we want to support the very best environmental practices on an estate which our members view as one of Scotland's crown jewels

The first site that we visited was just west of the road along the track to the White Bridge. To us, this looked like poor management. Trees had been felled and hauled to the track by horse logging and then just left. See attached photos. Why pay for them to be cut and hauled to the track and then just left? We agree with the general observation that there isn't enough dead wood in the area but, as you know, this needs to be in the form of standing dead trees and not rotting logs in the mud. Standing dead trees support different lichens, flora and invertebrates than lying logs left to rot. See attached photos.

The second site that we visited was immediately west of the car park. The ruts from felling by machines, see attached photos, are an eyesore. Contrary to what is stated on your web site, that they "do no long-term damage to the ground", the ruts do not heal naturally and the podzol is destroyed for a very long time and cannot be manually reinstated. I understand that Adam Watson demonstrated this with a soil pit on 1/10/13. The acidic podzol is an integral part of the boreal forest ecosystem. After heavy machine use, the soils are compacted and the different layers, formed over many centuries, are mixed. The ground vegetation, decomposing leaf litter, black humus and the grey upper mineral layer are very acidic. After they have been mixed with the reddish-brown mineral layer underneath, which is far less acidic, a new vegetation colonises with smooth grasses,

brambles, nettles and other foreign species, leaving less bare ground. Rushes and sphagnum mosses take over in hollows, where water collects. Examination of such areas after a few years shows virtually no natural regeneration of pine seedlings. Use of lighter machines coupled with more effective use of brash, or even horse logging, would prevent this destruction.

We also noted a lot of damage by red deer barking living trees and large quantities of droppings, corresponding with this area being on the “wrong side” of the new deer fence. Given the excellent work which is leading to regeneration on the east side of the fence, we are interested in what the Trust’s policy on woodland and deer numbers in this area.

The third site, just east of where the Lui Water crosses the road shows large piles of logs. These are not a natural feature and should be aged outside the forest, near to the bio-mass boiler. We also noted a lot of ring-barking to kill the trees and hence promote more standing dead wood. Surely the aim should be to allow the trees to compete for light and space and hence derive dead wood in a natural way? Alternatively, is the demand for wood for the bio-mass boiler so large that thinning will now have to be so regular that tree competition will be effectively ended?

I look forward to hearing your views on these issues.

Yours sincerely,

David Windle (Chairman of North East Mountain Trust)



Photos of logs just left lying around



Photos of severe rutting caused by use of heavy timber machines